

[Advice for the graduates](#)

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The cartoon on this page tells a sad story — graduates from high school and college are joining a pretty ugly job market.

Not only do we already have high unemployment, but our rapidly changing world makes it likely that careers which some graduates may have hoped for — or even prepared for — may not exist in the future.

The best advice I can offer is this:

If you're entering college, do everything you can to get your education without going into debt. Sadly, there are very few careers which are going to support paying off student loans.

Take a look at the real job prospects for your interests. The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (www.bls.gov) publishes reports in its Occupational Outlook Handbook that provide summaries of types of occupations, their expected demand, pay level and what type of educational preparation is needed.

If you have the aptitude — whatever age you might happen to be — consider going into engineering or health care, even if it means you need to go back to school or change course and go longer. These are fields for which job prospects remain bright.

If you're entering the workforce, recognize that there is plenty of competition. Don't take it personal if you don't get a job — or even an interview. There are lots of people in the same boat. Older people with experience and veterans returning from military service are standing in line with you.

Remember, too, that you're young. The life expectancy for people graduating from high school this year is nearly 10 years longer, for instance, than that projected for those born in the Baby Boom years.

Even biological clocks are on your side — you can reasonably plan on safely starting families later than your parents, for instance.

If you can't find paid work in your desired field, perhaps you can find volunteer work that will give you experience you can use when paid positions are available. You might even get to see the world.

Some opportunities require you to plan ahead. The Peace Corps, for instance, requires applications by July 1 of this year for placement beginning in July 2012. AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) programs are available throughout California and elsewhere in the country and generally have a shorter application timeframe. These programs offer experience and stipends to cover living expenses.

If you're 18-23, you might want to consider the California Conservation Corps. With a motto that proudly promises "hard work, low pay and miserable conditions," CCC members do lots of important work throughout the state while they also are provided with living expenses and training.

And, of course, some will find that military service offers them opportunities to serve the nation and gain experience and education.

As a generation that has grown up with technology, you should easily be able to find the websites that describe these programs — you can apply online.

And, I believe, time is on your side. You're entering the work force while we Baby Boomers are still hanging on. Many who would have retired already are keeping jobs because of the downturn in the economy (or maybe to continue to help you get your education). But the clock is ticking and within a few years the largest generation will retire and that will help your job prospects if you've used the time to prepare yourself well.

Wind industry

I mentioned the Bureau of Labor Statistics and that agency has published, for the first time, an outlook report called "Careers in Wind Industry."

According to the BLS, "Wind-generating capacity in the United States grew 39 percent per year from 2004 to 2009, and is expected to grow more rapidly as demand for renewable energy increases. As the wind energy industry continues to grow, it will provide many opportunities for workers in search of new careers. These careers extend beyond the wind farm: it also takes the efforts of workers in factories and offices to build and operate a turbine."

You can find the report online at www.BLS.gov (click on Occupational Outlook Handbook and the Wind Energy report is linked from that page).

The report provides a good overview of the industry, noting that it includes three phases — manufacturing, project development and operations and maintenance.

Within each of these phases, job growth is expected, but the BLS notes that because of the relative youth of the industry, there are not lots of statistics available.

In Tehachapi, of course, we are seeing the growth of the industry and people with knowledge of all phases live among us. Training programs are emerging and we plan to publish stories to help those with an interest in this field later this summer.

As with most industries, wind has its detractors. Projects proposed for Sand Canyon and the mountains south of town (Pahnamid) have area residents concerned. In an earlier column I shared my belief that the county needs to site these projects very carefully.

Still, wind and solar projects represent opportunity for our young people — and have become an important part of the regional economy.

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